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*Serving those who served.*

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# News Release

Feb. 4, 2010

## VA facilities open doors for Iraq Veterans

Veterans Affairs medical centers in Coatesville and Philadelphia are preparing to open their doors and welcome hundreds of recently returned combat Veterans to the VA health care system.

These Soldiers from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard will be at their local VA medical centers February 27 and 28 for a Post-Deployment Health Reassessment Activity, or PDHRA, during their scheduled drill weekend. The Department of Defense requires service men and women to complete this program three to six months after returning from deployment, and these Soldiers returned from Iraq in August and September.

VA planners expect about 400 troops at each medical center, where they will work with health care providers to identify potential health issues – and treat known health problems before they affect a person's future deployment status or career. According to DOD officials, many deployment-related health problems may not arise until three to six months after someone returns from deployment.

"This is a great opportunity to partner with the VA and help these soldiers with their transition," said Lt. Col. Chris Cleaver, a Pennsylvania National Guard spokesman. "It's all about doing the right thing for them and linking them up with the support agencies they may need."

The program is also an opportunity for these men and women to learn about and take charge of their VA health care benefits. Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are entitled to five years of VA health care for conditions which may be related to their

deployments. VA staff will provide information on VA benefits, help schedule follow-up appointments, and enroll troops for VA health care.

“We welcome the opportunity to support the Guard and help these young men and women take advantage of the benefits they have earned,” said Richard S. Citron, Philadelphia VA Medical Center Director. “America has made a promise to this new generation of Veterans, and the VA has every intention of keeping it.”

These soldiers are part of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard’s 56th Stryker Brigade, which has elements in Philadelphia and at armories across the Commonwealth, from Harrisburg to Huntingdon and Altoona to Erie. Of the seven U.S. Army units assigned the Stryker mission, the 56th is the only one in the National Guard.

“At VA, it is our job to reach each and every returning service member,” said Gary W. Devansky, Coatesville VA Medical Center Director. “We are pleased to team with the Pennsylvania National Guard to make these Soldiers’ introduction to VA health care as beneficial as possible.”

The Iraq mission marked the largest Pennsylvania National Guard deployment since World War II, and VA facilities across the state are ready for the Soldiers’ return.

More information on benefits and support available for returning combat Veterans is available at [www.philadelphia.va.gov](http://www.philadelphia.va.gov) and [www.coatesville.va.gov](http://www.coatesville.va.gov).

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